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A LECTURE

UPON THE

REGAL PERIOD IN ROMAN HISTORY,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

GAMMA NU LITERARY SOCIETY

OF YALE COLLEGE,

NEW HAVEN, CONN., OCTOBER 3, 1885.

BY

HERBERT C. TOLMAN.

CLASS OF '88.

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LECTURE.

“MORIBUS ANTIQUIS STAT RES ROMANA VIRISQUE.” *Cic. De Rep. v. 1.*

With what profound respect, admiration and sadness do we gaze upon the ruins of an ancient city! A respect, which antiquity may justly demand from our own age; an admiration, when we consider what a part it once has held in the world's history, as we reflect upon the noble deeds of its heroes and the lives of its statesmen, and when we read the burning and impassioned words of its orators, as their hearts were filled with desire for their country's advancement; but a sadness, when we think how its empire once so strong and dominion once so mighty have ceased to be, while its glory and fame live only through the pen of the historian, and its former grandeur and magnificence alone remain in sad relics of holy temples and ruins of grand old palaces, once the seat of pride and arrogance. With what delight do we dwell upon its history, and turn our minds to the study of its ancient customs and antiquities! What a pleasure is ours, as we stand at this advanced age, to look back and to survey the progress of the world through the centuries which are past!

An allusion to Babylon, so renowned in sacred literature, as she sat in her might, the head of the great eastern empire, the mention of Tyre, once the rich metropolis of the Phœnicians, the name of Troy, whose tragic end so inspired the song of the Epic poets, as it fell before the invading armies of Hellas, alike awaken feelings which only the story of a nation's growth, a nation's glory and power, and a nation's fall can excite. But with what peculiar interest do we love to consider the history of Rome, with what delight to reflect upon the former greatness

and majesty of its dominion, and with what a sense of awe and reverence to gaze upon its colossal edifices, while we attempt to picture to ourselves its splendor and magnificence during the declining days of the republic!

And why should we not be bound to Rome by an almost inseparable tie? Let us look for a moment over our own country and see for ourselves the great indebtedness which we owe to Roman power, architecture, law and language. Behold our churches and then go back and see their model in the Basilica, the hall of justice. Study the excellence of Roman law and comprehend how it is the very basis and foundation of our own civil codes. Consider to what an extent the language of Latinum as the dialect of the people, far different from the pure style of the classic writers, has spread over the whole continent and through the lapse of centuries gradually framed the language of Italy, Spain, France and Portugal, hence giving to their speech the name of Romance languages. Think what a transmitting power it has been to erudition, how its literature has been and still is fostered in the schools and universities of the world, and how for ages it has been the language of the Christian church. Rome then has committed to us a legacy, greater in some respects than the benefits of literature, learning, art and science, which have been the dowry of Greece to the present age, and of far more value to the public good than the adornment of our buildings with Corinthian columns or the study of her statues and grand old paintings.

How far unlike its rival in the classic world is the city of our consideration!

Athens, the pride of the scholar, the immortal city of literary fame, the genius of the ancient world, lives, not in her former power, not in the glory of military achievement, but for her philosophers, sages, poets and orators, for her refinement and culture, for her ancient customs and religious devotion. But the splendor of Rome is her former dominion, her ancient empire, her remarkable history and her brilliant career.

What a deep interest does the recital of her advancement inspire in the mind of its reader, from the very moment he is ushered into her history with her fabled beginning, to when with stronger emotions he reads the thrilling and startling deeds of the emperors!

As we are about to consider the history of Rome in its earliest period, would it not be well to ask ourselves, before we proceed farther, why that city alone was destined to its high place in the annals of the globe as the head of nations and mistress of the world, to explain the cause of its greatness and why success so often followed the Roman eagles? Why did not Naples, Tarentum or Veii become the center of an empire as well as Rome? Is it because the race possessed such remarkable excellence over the neighboring tribes? Is it that the site of the city was far more advantageous for commercial interests and the pursuit of agriculture?

To these questions we shall give a negative answer, while we are obliged to admit that the blood of the Roman has no superiority over that of his neighbor the Etruscan or Samnite. The story which the poets delighted to sing, of how the imperial city, guided and destined by fate, sprang from the scanty survivors of the flames of Troy, has long since showed absurdity to the most credulous. Again the location of Rome was a special detriment to a nation's growth, in the fact that its harbor was of no great value, its climate unhealthy and its soil not noted for its great fertility.

Although these may be arguments in favor of our negative answer, yet in some degree does the city owe its power to these seeming hindrances in its progress. That it possessed a sea-port of no excellence prevented the frequent incursions and attacks of pirates which were so often fatal to cities in their infancy. It can be possible again that the unhealthy climate of the region served as a check against foreign invasion. Furthermore, sterility of soil only induces a nation to spread its territory and seek booty from other tribes. With these two questions in

consideration let us turn our thoughts to another which may justly claim our attention.

Does Rome owe its might to men of talent or genius? This is needless for us to answer; I only ask that we place the fabulous names of Numa Pompilius and Servius Tullius side by side with such personages as Solon, Pericles and Alexander and men of a later day as Charlemagne, Frederick and Bonaparte, and our answer is determined. No, Rome's advancement is due not to its men of genius, of intellect and foresight. The time of its statesmen, the days of Cæsar, Cicero and Sulla, mark the decay of the republic.

At what conclusion then shall we at last arrive, or shall we finally be obliged to say with reverence that it was the will of an ever ruling Providence that Rome should rise and fill the part she held in the world's history, while the reason of her advancement must be forever veiled in mystery?

If we look again at the geographical situation of Latium, we can consider the nearness of the seven hills an important factor in the city's growth; for, dwelling in such proximity to the settlements established so bordering upon their own, they naturally felt the need of an alliance and mutual protection in time of war. Rome then gradually, after forming this confederacy and gaining sway over this immediate vicinity, began to reach out over the whole of Italy and embrace, as associates and allies, the people who did not at first feel the dependence and subjection which was afterward imposed upon them.

Resting content with this cause alone as the predominant and principal reason to which the city owes its long continued power and prosperity, let us now study its history in this early period, and collect by the few authentic records that are ours some facts in the story of its infancy.

It is well known what implicit faith ancient writers and historians had in the fabulous stories of Rome's early history, with what definite exactness they were wont to relate the facts in the reign of Numa or Servius, and with what certainty was

it their custom to fix the very date of the foundation of the city on the 21st day of April, 753 B. C. Although they were often startled and perplexed when some miracle of that early age came to their consideration, yet they looked upon it merely as the purpose of giving life and animation to the narrative and making the first pages in the annals of Rome furnish a far greater charm to their reader. In such delusion and childlike simplicity did the early history of the city hold both the ancient and modern world. It was the pleasure of Milton and Bacon, as well as the delight of Vergil and Cicero, to foster the incredible accounts of Rome's infancy as a sacred legacy, transmitted to their own age, in which was recorded with comparative exactness the story of a nation's early struggles.

Although, when the advancement of learning in the 15th century swept over the continent of Europe, scholars began to look with less credence upon these primitive accounts, it was not however until the dawn of our own century, when Niebuhr published his work so full of skepticism in regard to these facts heretofore almost universally believed, which publication was immediately followed by others of eminent literary men of the time, that the strong faith and belief in these old traditions which for so long had enjoyed a place in the annals of history as authentic records, was gradually swept away.

To Niebuhr then do we owe the privilege, which is ours, of looking upon this early period, not with a view to the study of its story as a matter of historical importance, but to consider the absurdity of its accounts and to ask why such fables originated. The first one of these considerations, namely the absurdity of its details, we will discuss as follows:

Roman history can be well divided into three distinct stages. The first period can be marked as extending from the foundation of the city in 753 B. C. up to 390 B. C., at which time monuments commemorating important national events, were destroyed. Furthermore, important laws engraved on brazen tablets with the exception of the twelve tables, and

annals kept by the Pontiff show no certainty of extending back beyond this date. Therefore it is left for us to conjecture that this first stage of Roman history is one entirely based on tradition, and in this light we will consider it.

The second epoch in history of the city is embraced by the years 390 and 280 B. C. from which latter date the third period, which is the era of contemporaneous history, begins. To this last stage we can give the name of authentic history, while the period before can be relied upon only in leading facts, as important events of their warfare and struggles and the glory of their personal exploits were transmitted from fathers to sons, and therefore subject to national and personal pride. When we go back beyond this point into the first period which claimed our attention, even tradition itself has been clouded during the lapse of centuries and the early history of the nation intermingled and confused with that of other countries.

Shall we ask ourselves the question, did kingship ever exist at Rome? Various things served to corroborate this fact; the existence of some important offices as the interrex, the king and queen of sacrifices, the law against any person aspiring to sovereignty, and various objects in the vicinity of Rome as the Ruminal fig tree and hut of Romulus. These facts are the only arguments outside of vague tradition which go to establish the theory that sovereign power at one time existed in the ancient city. What folly and delusion therefore to write out a lengthy history of the regal power in Rome, to tell of its invasions and foreign wars, and to try to determine the very day of its founding.

Many facts of historical importance may perhaps be found in the poetic stories of early Rome, yet to show the absurdity with greater force, let us imagine the history of its beginning as related by Livy genuine and true.

The reign of Numa, you remember, was one of perpetual peace. Could the Romans and their neighbors live on such amicable terms when the preceding reign of Romulus and the

advent of Servius were periods of uninterrupted warfare? Is not that as difficult to credit as the fictitious founding of the city or the ascent of Romulus into heaven? Again, the season of kingly power occupied 240 years, leaving to each king then the average age of 34 years. Does this seem really comprehensible when we consider that only three of the seven escaped death by violence? Is it consistent to narrate how Tarquin, at the age of eighty, left children young and tender, while according to another account they were married with those of Servius his successor, since in the former case the second Tarquin had reached the age of fifty years and in the latter seventy, when he is represented as dragging the aged king from the senate-house with all the vigour and passion of youth? These legends sound well as they are sung and recited by the poets, but they cannot escape the keen and searching investigation of the historian.

Many other such absurdities can be clearly shown and brought to light, should we dwell longer on this subject; but let us now turn our thoughts to the consideration of the second question, from what cause did fabulous history originate. Is it strange that from the point where authentic records stop and where history is merged into tradition, Roman as well as Greek should frame and invent stories to explain the cause of certain existing customs and remarkable facts? Is it a greater marvel that the cunning and fertile mind of the Athenian, as it busied itself fashioning a mythology from the wonders of nature as it spread out before him, should in a like degree employ this same ingenious power in explaining the reason of great events in his own national history? Although the mind of the Roman was far too incomprehensive and his imagination far too slow for the invention of fabulous stories at that early age, yet by foreign help and national simplicity Rome's regal history has been moulded into its present shape.

For what would be more natural than, when Rome kept acquiring territory after territory and success so often followed

the Roman legions, and since the glory of the nation was her mightiness in war, that the poets and relaters of legends should attribute to the founder of their city the descent from the war god Mars? This story bears too much the vivid coloring of the Greek imagination to escape our observation, and similar allusions to exposed children occur in the history of the East, as the myth concerning Cyrus exemplifies. Again, if we consider the name of Servius, we shall see how the story of his miraculous birth from a virgin slave found credence. As the Roman *nomen* marks the person's gens or house, this fable was doubtless invented to explain the simple existence of this epithet as derived from the Latin word for slave. So the popular name of Scaevola, meaning literally left handed, was compelled to coin another story, of how the old hero Mucius in the war with Porsenna held his right hand over the fire until it was reduced to ashes, thus by his fortitude showing the bravery of the Roman spirit and transmitting this name to posterity.

These then are a few of the ætiological myths invented to explain the cause of some existing circumstances.

We can not regard the history of the regal period complete even with the meagre explanation which we have now enjoyed, unless we direct our thoughts to an inquiry in regard to the genesis of Roman religion. As we discuss this in a brief way, it will be for our advantage to turn our attention to a like development in our own savage tribes. In connection with this reference let me relate an incident of every day occurrence in the hut of the Indian.

The great warrior after a day of conflict and toil enters his wigwam, throws himself before his warm fire, and in a few moments is dreaming of the chase or hunt. As he awakes from his sleep, he finds himself still in the same position, though he feels confident that he has been pursuing the boar and roaming the fields with his savage companions. To his clouded and bewildered mind what explanation could be more satisfactory than that two distinct selves, as it were, composed

his being? While one self was reclining before the fire, the other self had been engaged in its daily pursuits. In what other view, with this in consideration, could he look upon death than the departure of this same mysterious self from its joint companion? Since after sleep these two elements of his person, as he supposed, were once more united, is it strange therefore that he should look upon his dead companion without feeling impressed with the certainty that this other self which had gone to the happy hunting ground should return to his body as it did so often in sleep? This was the vague and indistinct conception which forced itself upon his untrained intellect.

Can we not be allowed to suppose that the same idea was planted in the mind of the Italian? Is it not our right to conclude that the deep veneration in which they held the shades of their ancestors was the same motive that actuated the savage to look with such respect upon the dead warrior? In the houses and dwellings of the city altars were erected to the memory of deceased friends: and what could be more appropriate or significant than that the family hearth should symbolize a shrine and pledge of family devotion to the dead and an assurance of his care and protection? So the city in its growth was only a large family with the king at its head, and with mutual homage did they adore the temple of Vesta, the hearth of the city, and the sacred fire guarded by the Vestal virgins. This then let us consider as the very germ and beginning of the Roman religion, which afterward with a few fables of their own invention was so blended and intermingled with Greek mythology that to separate the two is impossible.

This exceedingly limited discussion upon the regal period in the history of the city in which we have engaged, is lacking the deep interest and intense pleasure with which we would consider the nation's further prosperity and success. Yes, it would be our delight to reflect upon the lives of its orators and statesmen, to admire the glorious achievements of its gener-

als, to dwell upon the philosophy of that religion which was the guide of the aged Cato, and to discuss the gods of the Pantheon whose praise is the song of the Epic poet.

Perhaps it may be curiosity alone which makes the dark ages that history fails to record seem so attractive to their student, the same fascination perchance which induces us to gaze with wonder and delight upon the hieroglyphics of Egypt and seek with eager minds the story that they tell.

But a far higher motive than one of careless curiosity or of even mere intellectual culture, however noble may be its aim, will I, in closing, place before you for your reflection. It is that in comparing the present and the past we shall appreciate with a greater sense of gratitude the inestimable blessings of our own age. Think how no tradition with a feeble and palsied hand shall picture to coming generations their nation's history, but with glowing and impassioned souls they will read in implicit faith the story of Concord and Bunker Hill, and with deepening interest view their country's progress and advancement.

Let us then be filled with praise and gratefulness to Divine Providence that it is ours to reap the high attainments of learning and science, to appreciate the benefits of an advanced age, to profit by the privileges of a free constitution, and to enjoy the ineffable blessings of Christian religion. Finally then let us with hearts filled with patriotic devotion commend our own land, our common country, to the fostering care of a Divine Benignity.

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